

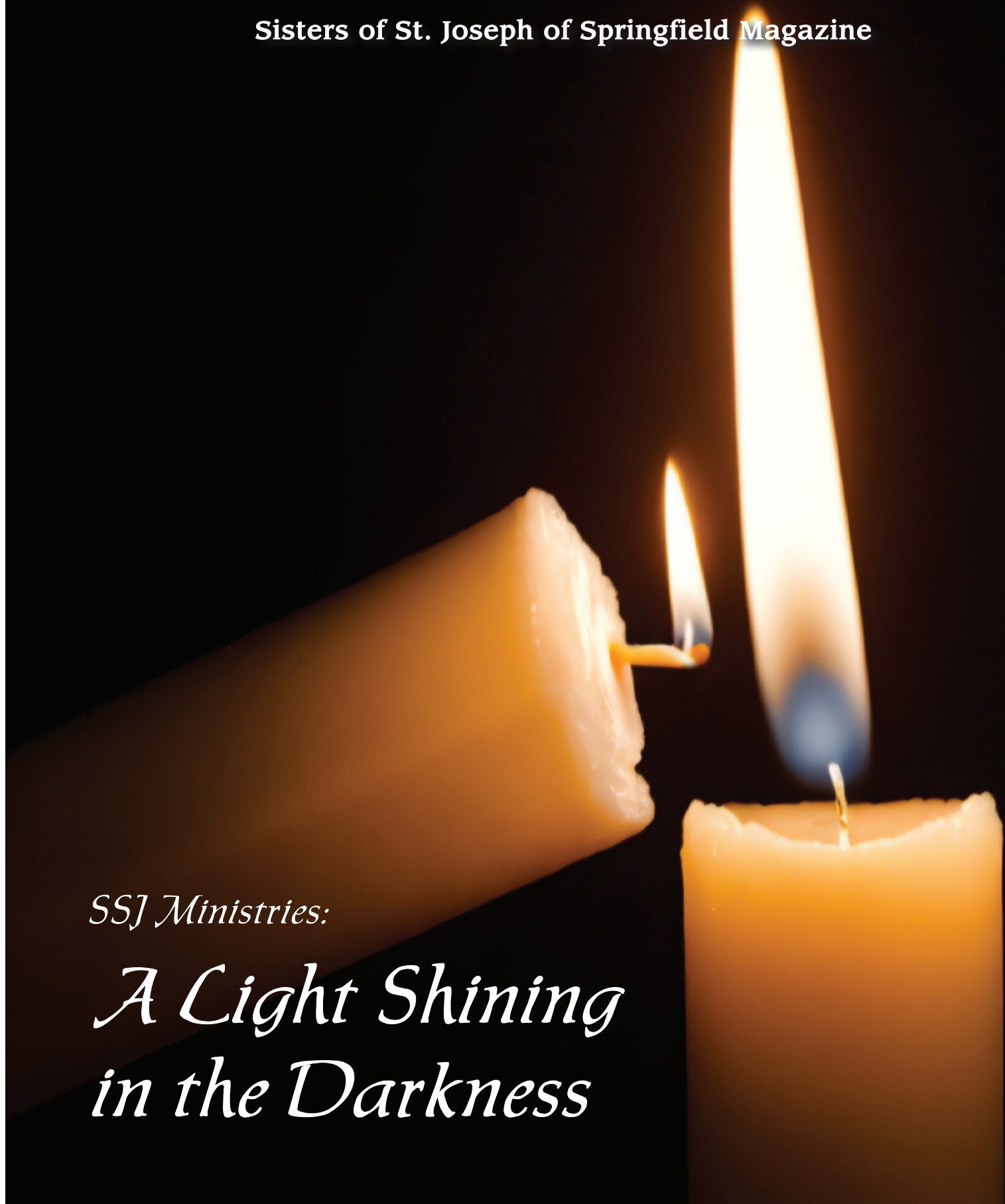
# *Witness*

Spring 2024  
Volume 33

Sisters of St. Joseph of Springfield Magazine

*SSJ Ministries:*

*A Light Shining  
in the Darkness*



# *Witness*

Spring 2024  
Volume 33

*Witness is published each Spring by the  
Development Office of the Congregation of the  
Sisters of St. Joseph of Springfield.*

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Rhode Island

Jamaica

Vermont

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*“HOPE  
is being  
able to see  
that there is  
Light  
despite the  
darkness.”*

—Desmond Tutu







## From the President's Office

Elizabeth Sullivan, SSJ

Embracing the light is truly a gift of God's presence leading us to engage with others in the service of ministry to one another. Sensing the light of God's love reflects grace that provides us with courage, energy, and initiative to welcome and respond to newness within our lives. For years our Sisters have taken this light, this grace and shared it with the "dear neighbor" following the example of our early Sisters and we continue to do so!

We recognize too that amid light there is often darkness that limits the lives of others as we see throughout our world today. As Sisters of St. Joseph, we pray for peace throughout our world especially in the Middle East, for a just resolution to the immigration situation at the Border, for truth and honesty in our government and our pending election, for a resolution to poverty and homelessness. We believe that light shines in the darkness as hope overcomes darkness.

In this edition of Witness, you will read how our Sisters minister to others who experience the light shining in the darkness. You will read a personal reflection from an Interfaith Chaplain, how a spiritual director accompanies another in spiritual growth and retreat ministry, and how our Justice and Peace Coordinator aligns the work of justice and peace to reflect the essence of hope and light amid so much darkness. Our articles conclude with a story from an Elementary School Principal who has loved Catholic education and will be retiring at the end of this school year. These articles enable us to see the light shining in the darkness and we are hopeful!

Throughout the years, the Sisters of St. Joseph have continued to work to "unite neighbor with neighbor and neighbor with God without distinction" and continue to do so given our aging process. Our mission is presence, and we trust in the unfolding mystery of God.

To you, our benefactors and friends, we express our gratitude for your generosity to us and for the varied ways in which you support us and our ministries.

With deep gratitude,

Elizabeth (Betsy) Sullivan, SSJ President



# *Let the Light that is within you SHINE!*

As you reflect on the following articles written by our sisters, observe how each one strives to bring LIGHT to the people with whom she ministers. LIGHT is a symbol of holiness, wisdom, goodness and hope. May we be reminded how each of us can be LIGHT for others as we journey through life.

How can our light compliment the darkness?

By following our truth!

By standing up against injustice!

By stopping the bitterness and division!

By choosing Peace and Love!

*Let us stand with the Poet, Educator  
and Activist, Maya Angelou, who wrote:*

**“Nothing can dim the LIGHT that  
shines from within. You are stronger  
than you may think.”**

*Constance Quinlan, SSJ*



# *Interfaith Chaplain*

by Virginia Maitland, SSJ

As an Interfaith Chaplain at Baystate Medical Center in Springfield, no two days are ever the same. I may be in the Emergency Room with a gunshot victim and his/her family, at the bedside of a dying patient, at a family meeting where a patient and family are being told of the life-limiting prognosis for the patient, facilitating a spirituality group for psychiatric patients, or sitting and offering compassionate listening while a patient reflects on her/his life and speaks aloud the many blessings which have been given, and sometimes asks for forgiveness. As a 720 bed trauma hospital in an urban setting, the population Baystate serves is diverse in culture, ethnicity, economic status, race, religious beliefs and practices. It is a profound ministry in which I am able to meet the face of the living God each day, to serve the dear neighbor without distinction, to whoever presents themselves.

My specific assignments are on the Palliative Care Team, Heart Failure unit and the Adult Psychiatric Treatment unit, as well as being on-call for one shift. This diversity of patient population and diagnoses offers me the opportunity to extend myself with inclusive love for each person. I see my ministry as one of presence and Presence, meaning I try to be fully present to each patient

as I bring God's Presence into that space. By being a non-anxious, interested presence I want to assist a patient in connecting with his/her sense of the Divine and to access the strength and support of one's spirituality. I often pray with patients, including in the prayer the concerns the person has articulated.

Recent experiences help to elucidate my ministry. A woman with whom I had visited previously was in excruciating pain, she was very religious

*continued next page*



*Preparing for a memorial service at Baystate's labyrinth, during the pandemic.*



*continued from previous page*

and acknowledged God's presence with her. As I sat with her, holding her hand and gently stroking her forehead, she cried out, "Why is God doing this to me?" My only response was, "I know..."



*Sister Ginny Maitland at her office.*

What I knew and what she knew was that God was not doing this, her body was, and God was with her in this suffering and pain. A few days later she had entered into the dying process, and as I approached her bed, she reached out her hand and said, "Ah, Miss Ginny!" I felt that she was acknowledging the Divine Presence that accompanied me into that room, the comfort and soothing that our spirituality can bring, the offering of compassion, knowing that soon she would be held in the Eternal Embrace. This patient was a middle-aged single mother, and I sat with and offered grief support to her only child as she kept vigil.

Being with patients in their dying is such a sacred trust which I never take for granted. When there are loved ones present it is a delight to engage them in life review, and it helps to situate this death in the context of a life. When there is no one present and I am called to be with a dying patient, it is such a deeply spiritual moment to be able to sit quietly, to breathe together, to offer prayer aloud or in silence, sometimes sing, and softly pray blessings of peace.

Another aspect of this ministry is staff support, which was so much of our time during the Covid years and continues. Working in this large trauma hospital can often raise distress for staff as we are caregivers and witnesses to so much hardship, suffering, and death. By being available as a compassionate presence and providing a listening ear, staff can share their moral distress, feel heard and valued. Staff support may be attentive listening, offering counsel, sharing the burdens of grief and the joys of life. It may be to honor the strength and resilience of a particular employee amidst their family difficulties. Along with listening, I may offer a blessing, a piece of good chocolate or fancy tea. Supporting staff helps all of us to continue our compassionate care to patients and families amid such stressful shifts.

I am honored and blessed in this ministry of chaplaincy. I have been employed at Baystate Medical Center for 6 ½ years, and I can humbly say that I have never left at the end of my shift and not known at least one reason why I was there that day. Thanks be to God!



# *Sharing in Earth's Ecological Design*

by Lorraine Villemaire, SSJ

The Sharing in Earth's Ecological Design (SEED) Committee was formed in 1996 to address peace and justice issues regarding Earth's environment. Two particular SEED activities provided a strong background to learn about ecological (Earth) spirituality. Some members attended Sisters of Earth conferences across the US. SEED also held a monthly book club by authors like Thomas Berry, Brian Swimme, Judy Cannato, Mary Evelyn Tucker, Richard Rohr, Phillip Newell and Margaret Macintyre.

Educational and spiritual environmental materials were passed on to all community members. For example, after reading the book *Just Water* by Christiana Zenner, SEED developed a small pamphlet titled "Water is a Fundamental Right-to-Life Issue." Within its pages were water poems, ways to conserve water and prayers about water as a sacred gift.



*Sister Lorraine Villemaire speaks at last year's Earth Day celebration.*

An in-ground labyrinth was built at Mont Marie. Labyrinth walks, prayer days on different environmental themes are provided yearly, some days ending with a treat of strawberry short cake. Though topics were serious, moments of laughter prevailed.

As a SEED member, my life changed. I was able to begin a portable and in-ground labyrinth ministry that brought me to schools, churches, prisons, spiritual organizations and homes. The authors mentioned above gave me an understanding of what is happening in our world today and why.

All these activities built a solid background to help address the dangers and destruction of climate change in the world today. Pope Francis encyclical *Laudato Si'* states that, "A great cultural, spiritual and educational challenge stands before us, and it will demand that we set out on the long path to renewal. "



# *Spiritual Accompaniment and Retreat*

by Patricia Smith, SSJ

Have you ever done an exercise referred to as the 'River Mee' or an exercise named 'Dynamic Memory'? Either of these two exercises can reveal in detail how God/Love has been and continues to be present and active in you from the moment of your existence.

Each person has a story and each story is a sacred story! In all of the events, big and small, joyful and painful, God's gentle hands were leading and guiding you until this very moment and molding you into who you are today.

Being aware of God's presence to me and the call to surrender to God's Love is my call. This call is offered to me each and every day of my life. My response is never once and for all. Anthony of the Desert said, "Every morning I must say again to myself, today I start."

Spiritual Accompaniment is an ancient practice where one person listens deeply to the story of another, helping the other to hear the call of the holy in the text and symbols of his or her life.

I want to share with you the Icon of Jesus and Menas, as it points out just how ancient is the practice of spiritual accompaniment and expresses in icon form what spiritual accompaniment means even for today.

This Icon is one of the oldest still existing from 6th or 7th century. It is older than the Russian and Greek icons. It is a picture meditation of an Egyptian monk who lived in a monastery in the desert. The monastery was destroyed and all traces of this and other Christian places in Egypt disappeared. For centuries the icon remained hidden in the sand of the desert until it was 'discovered in the 19th century by French archeologists.

Menas, the 'friend of Jesus' on the icon, was and still is a much loved saint of the Coptic Orthodox Church in Egypt. The story of a deep friendship is told here with a great simplicity and a deeply human touch.

The halos above each of the two friends are a symbol of the Spirit of God surrounding them. It is clear that the two are on the way together.

Jesus has only the Gospel with him: his message, the Good News, is for everyone who is ready to journey with him, as a friend. He is ready to be our daily companion.

Menas is apparently an abbot. The scroll in his hand could be the Rule of Life of the monastery, based on the gospel.

Both of their gazes are directed on God and on the people to whom they are sent. Striking is Menas' right hand which is in the shape about to give a blessing: the one who journeys with Jesus becomes a blessing for others. It is a blessing which flows from the cross. The friendship between the two stands under the sign of the cross: seen in the small triangle on top behind the two friends.

Jesus and Menas are 'on the way'. It seems like both are stepping OUT of the frame of the picture. They are truly on the way...moving forward... The NOW and the HERE are important. Important is the road,



*The icon of Jesus and Menas.*



the way of today. Important is the person who walks with you now and here...and the person or persons towards whom you go.

The dialogue with the figures represented in the icon only starts when you allow yourself to be 'touched' by the gaze of Jesus. Allowing Jesus to look at you, and you looking at Jesus is the deepest and most significant reality. Thus you also can enter yourself in the story of his friendship and it becomes Your Story.

Spiritual accompaniment focuses on the Presence of God/Love in daily life and seeking to enable a person to respond to the movements of that Presence in even deeper and broader ways by intentionally meeting with a spiritual companion on a regular basis to share about what is happening in their relationship with self, others, creation and God. There is an African saying, "If you want to arrive quickly, go alone; if you want to arrive safely, go with others – go in company, go with your people."

Some gifts of such accompaniment for you could be experiencing the unconditional love and mercy of God, becoming more aware of the Presence of God in all of life experiences and discernment in making choices in your life.

Spiritual Accompaniment is not problem-based though problems may be a part of a person's spiritual journey. It is also not solution-based. It is faith-based: listening to how God is speaking with me through my life situation. Listening for how God is shedding light on what is happening in my life NOW.

There is so much I have learned and continue to learn through the ministry of spiritual accompaniment. Number one is that you cannot tell me there is "no God" or that God is nowhere. The story is told of a little girl when she saw a poster hanging in a room which said: GOD IS NOWHERE, she suddenly began reading aloud, GOD...IS...NOW... HERE! For myself, I am always amazed and sometimes dumbfounded at just how God works in people's lives—Divine Presence is quite alive and doing well. I just have to be sure I don't get in the way of grace!

Each human being in this world has the same basic human needs—longings deep in their hearts, desires to be loved and accepted, to be in service to others, to be forgiven and to forgive, and a reason and purpose for living.

I have experienced, through these ministries, that God cannot NOT communicate with us! At each moment God is trying to get my attention whether through word, poetry, music, art, body, dreams and so much more. The inner life is rooted in symbol and image and speaks the language of dreams; no wonder it is the primary language of the holy.

As I continue with these ministries I experience anew that it is imbedded in our charism uniting neighbor with neighbor and neighbor with God and all of creation and inviting each person to whatever the 'MORE' is in their life in the present.

Many a time I hear the words God spoke to Moses at the Burning Bush: "For the place where I am standing is holy Ground" (Ex. 3:5) It has been and continues to be very holy ground I stand on when accompanying another in whatever mode.

Monica Brown says it for me in her song, 'Holy Ground'.

*"This is holy ground  
We're standing on holy ground  
For the Lord is present  
And where God is, is holy."*

I am so grateful to be in this ministry.



*Sister Pat Smith.*



# Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation

by Annette McDermott, SSJ

From the founding of the Sisters of St. Joseph, we have integrated contemplation and action. Our earliest sisters, along with non-vowed members called Agrégeés, would go out to the streets of France and engage poor women in making lace. This allowed the women to earn income while also providing a sense of support and community where the women could talk as they made lace to sell. In our current times, this does not seem as radical as it was in those times. Throughout our history, we have integrated spirituality with issues of justice.

Currently, vowed sisters, Agrégeés and Associates continue this integration. One avenue that provides a central focus for this reflection and action is the Office of Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation (JPIC.) This is the place where our collective experiences of “seeing God in all things” come together with our commitment to our consensus statement to “unite neighbor with neighbor and neighbor with God—without distinction.” It is the creative pot where we can stir our imagination for reflecting and acting on our current Chapter Commitment, “to address our divided church, the sin of racism, and the destruction of Earth.”

Working groups on antiracism and *Laudato Si* (Pope Francis’s encyclical on the climate crisis) partner with Sharing in Earth’s Ecological Design (SEED), our eco-spirituality committee. These groups meet regularly to plan educational and spiritual events around their related topics. For example, the racism committee supported our cosponsoring an educational event with the Elms College, Black Experience Summit, during Black History month. The SEED committee offered a reflective booklet that integrates spirituality with care for the earth during Lent. We also belong to the group, Nuns Against Gun Violence (NAGV.) This coalition represents nearly 60 U.S. congregations of Catholic sisters.

How do we do our ministry? In addition to the working groups, monthly meetings are held from October through to May. Our gatherings are where we hear from those impacted by issues we have deemed as priorities and engage in conversations around those themes and intersecting topics, i.e., human trafficking, climate justice, gun violence, racism, restorative justice, etc. This time helps us become more knowledgeable about what is happening in our community. It is through the stories of our “dear neighbor” that we learned this year about the pain and root causes of sexual exploitation and trafficking or the desperation of those seeking to cross the border. It is the personal accounts witnessed or shared by our speakers that provide Imago Dei, the face of God to us. When you experience it—the noise of the world is silenced—only God’s eyes, can penetrate through the din. These days, however, even the most vulnerable image of God, is struggling to touch our hearts.

On the third Saturday of each month, as part of the Community of St. Joseph Reflection Days, we come together for time to meditate on what we discussed at our JPIC meeting. This sacred time deepens our



Sister Annette McDermott, helping out.

understanding of the issue presented. We share what touched us individually while paying attention to how the intertwining individual threads weave into a “we.” It is that openness to see a “we” that lovingly reveals a path forward: Hope. As vowed religious sisters, women who intentionally choose to live a community lifestyle, we see our ministry as an extension of our community and seek, through our JPIC ministry, to find ways to be companions on this journey with all, but especially those who are suffering, isolated, feeling misunderstood, marginalized, and simply unloved. It is also important to add that our outreach is in partnership with the whole Community of St. Joseph, our Agrégeés, Associates--and friends who partner with us—including our benefactors. The needs of our broader community are great. This ministry represents the heart of who we are. Every member, whether actively serving on a committee or working group, participates through their prayer and good works with the “dear neighbor.”





*Sister Patty Hottin and friends!*

# Catholic Education

by Patricia Hottin, SSJ

My love for Catholic education and the Sisters of St. Joseph is a story that has unfolded and strengthened over the last 56 years. Coming from a family who never looked away from Catholic education, my journey began at Our Lady of Hope School and Cathedral High School. Educated by strong women like Sr. Helen John, Sr. Mary Christopher and Sr. Marie de Lourdes, to name just a few, I saw a path...

My first assignment was teaching grade 1 in Uxbridge, Ma, where the reality of teaching 36 young children was a challenge and a realization that I was responsible for the lives of these beautiful children. My commitment to Catholic education became stronger with each year and experience.

I went to Sacred Heart in Pittsfield where Marge Wren and I team-taught 70 kindergarten students, 35

children in the morning and 35 in the afternoon. Catholic education was at its peak! I went to Northampton and opened a kindergarten. Sr. Eileen Shea was the principal and I felt that it was then that I learned and wanted to emulate her leadership in Catholic education.

Preschool education was becoming important to working parents and Mont Marie Child Care Center was born, with Sr. Vivian Pyne as the founding mother. Early education was flourishing throughout and our child care center brought integrity to and partnership with working families. My ministry at Mont Marie Child Care Center solidified my belief that parents are the primary educators...we have the privilege to join them!

From early education to Elms College, I fell in love with higher education at a Catholic college. It was a challenging time at Elms as enrollment was showing signs of what could be ahead. With Mount Holyoke and Smith College it was almost impossible competing as a women's college. Sr. Kathleen Keating, the strong leader she is, brought co-education to the forefront of Catholic education at Elms College.

My journey in Catholic education will be coming to an end at St. Thomas the Apostle School, where the history of Sisters of St. Joseph is strong and remembered by so many. Sr. Joseph Michael and Sr. Lillian Reilly handed over a wonderful school to me, a place where the charism and spirit of the Sisters of St. Joseph is integrated each and every day.

My students and families and teachers know that at St. Thomas, we live the mission of the Sisters of St. Joseph. We believe that we are surrounded by the great love of God and knowing "that all may be one" is a gift and a responsibility. My grade eight students knit hats for the homeless and have learned the history of lace making in France. Children and families work together as we reach out to the poor and needy throughout the school year.

I tell the story of Mother Mary Cecilia Bowen who in the 1800's gave oranges to the poor and books as well. She loved children and wanted them to learn how to read and wanted them to be happy every day.

Realizing that I'm the last SSJ principal and one of the last SSJs in Catholic education makes me somewhat melancholy, but I truly believe the Sisters of St. Joseph and Catholic education will go on.

The Sisters of St. Joseph have had the privilege of educating thousands of young people over the years and working with families and staff who truly believed in our mission.

The Sisters of St. Joseph and Catholic education will continue to change the world!



# From the Director of Development

Mary Ferguson, SSJ



Dear Friends,

*"The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." (Jn 1:5)*

These words from Scripture offer us hope and uplift our faith in these trying times.

You, our faithful donors and friends, are light for us as we strive to be faithful to our charism of "uniting neighbor with neighbor and neighbor with God, that all may be one".

Today, these words may seem as foreign to us as they did to our early Sisters in 1650, who also lived in times of great turmoil. Encouraged by their own faith and perseverance, the congregation survived through poverty, disbandment during the French Revolution, re-founding, and responding to the call from the "new world" to come and teach.

Over the years, our ministries have been many and varied. Founded to perform "all the spiritual and corporal works of mercy of which women are capable", we have served the young, the elderly, the sick, the incarcerated, the migrant, the poor, all our "dear neighbors".

Our increasing median age of 82 has not dampened our efforts or thwarted our will to continue our mission to serve all to the best of our ability. Many of our retired Sisters remain active in service to others while our infirm Sisters, through their ministry of prayer, remember us all.

As we continue to strive to fulfill our mission, your prayers and your generosity remain "lights in the darkness". For this we Thank You!

With deep gratitude,

*Mary Ferguson SSJ*

Sr. Mary Ferguson, SSJ



# *In Memoriam*

2023—2024



**Sr. Maureen Martin**  
(Thomas Mary)  
April 8, 2023



**Sr. Catherine Zajac**  
June 19, 2023



**Sr. Rita McCauley**  
(Rose Peter)  
June 29, 2023



**Sr. Judith Kappenman**  
(Kathleen Frederick)  
July 1, 2023



**Sr. Mildred Marengo**  
(Maria Peter)  
September 19, 2023



**Sr. Estelle Santarpia**  
(St. Pierre)  
October 23, 2023



**Sr. Ann Gibeault**  
(Dorothy Albert)  
November 11, 2023



**Sr. Claire Belforti**  
(Grace Edward)  
November 24, 2023



**Sr. Margaret McNaughton**  
(Dorothy James)  
December 26, 2023



**Sr. Mary Louise Brennan**  
(Francis Elizabeth)  
January 1, 2024



**Sr. Irene Comeau**  
(Paul Joseph)  
February 13, 2024



# Irish Gala

Sunday, February 25, 2024





# SSJ Golf Tournament

Monday, August 28, 2023



## SAVE THE DATE!

for our LAST  
SSJ Golf Tournament:  
Monday, August 26, 2024

# SSJ 500 CLUB

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*Clockwise, from upper left: Sr. Therese L'Heureux, skilled carpenter and repairer of all things broken, came upon a loose doorknob and set to work!*

*Middle and upper right: The Rutland Associates renewed their covenant at a gathering last August.*

*Center right: Sr. Mary McGeer leads a prayer service after a pizza supper in celebration of the Sisters' anniversaries of entrance into the community.*

*Bottom right and below: Several Sisters from Mont Marie Senior Residence gathered to make PB&J sandwiches for Kate's Kitchen, a ministry of Providence Ministries in Holyoke. The group has decided that they'd like to do it monthly.*

Find a Sister: [ssjspringfield.org/contactus/findasister/](http://ssjspringfield.org/contactus/findasister/) • Find us on Facebook: [facebook.com/ssjspringfield](https://facebook.com/ssjspringfield)



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